



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

MAY 2 2008

The Honorable Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-3405

Dear Senator Dorgan:

I am responding to your April 15, 2008, letter requesting that the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) proceed with job searches to fill four currently vacant research scientist positions at the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center (GFHNRC) in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

As you pointed out, recruitment for these positions has been temporarily suspended pending Congressional action on the Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget and program direction proposals for ARS. The vacant positions as well as all ARS permanent staff at the GFHNRC are proposed to be reassigned to other ARS Human Nutrition Research Centers at Beltsville, Maryland, and Davis, California, to undertake a nationally scoped and coordinated obesity prevention research program involving a representative cross-section of Americans across the country.

These reassignments as you know make up just one component of a much broader set of Agencywide program changes involving potential budget reductions, redirections, and laboratory consolidations. Collectively, they affect \$146 million in current ARS programs and about 700 employee positions, including the vacant ones at Grand Forks and elsewhere.

Because of the broad scope and potential personnel impacts of these budget proposals, ARS is taking a cautious and responsible approach toward the filling of position vacancies at all locations. We are striving to maximize our flexibilities to accommodate employees that might be displaced by budget actions as well as avoid any situation where newly employed personnel at one place may soon thereafter have to relocate elsewhere.

For the GFHNRC, we will not actually offer employment or fill the vacant positions until there has been resolution regarding the FY 2009 budget and the planned reassignment of the positions. However, ARS is taking the first steps in the job search process by

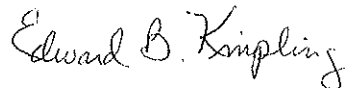


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redefining the position requirements to support the new national obesity research program. This will be followed by the issuance of competitive recruitment announcements to solicit the interest of highly qualified candidates for the positions at Grand Forks, which may alternatively be filled at Davis or Beltsville. This process is in concert with your suggestion to begin the search in a timely way and will importantly serve to define the complementary new responsibilities of the rest of the Center employees, who will also support the national obesity prevention research program whether they remain at Grand Forks or are relocated.

Thank you for your letter and support for ARS' new program direction on obesity prevention research.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edward B. Knipling".

EDWARD B. KNIPLING
Administrator